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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000375

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY),  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CELEBRATING CREATIVITY AT MUSCAT FESTIVAL

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SUMMARY  
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1. Embassy Muscat recently co-sponsored a month-long "Children's Art Workshop" at the Muscat Festival, attracting over 4,200 children and adults whose enthusiasm for this unique program augurs well for it becoming a permanent feature of the annual festival. Forging new ties with Muscat Municipality and the Ministry of Education, Dr. Linda Bastian - the American artist and art educator who launched this innovative concept at last year's Festival - introduced a variety of new media and projects to children from almost 200 Omani schools, offered "on-the-job" training to public school art teachers, and encouraged parents to celebrate their children's creative talents. End summary.

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BUILDING ON SUCCESS  
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2. With a 60% increase in participation over last year, the "Children's Art Workshop" was clearly a popular feature of the Muscat Festival. In fact, because the program was so successful last year, when it was implemented by the Embassy in cooperation with the Omani Society for Fine Arts, Festival organizers (Muscat Municipality) took the lead on the sponsorship and logistics for this year's event while relying on Dr. Bastian to develop innovative art projects and provide on-site teacher training. Described as "indispensable" by Muscat Municipality and working closely with the Director of Art for Muscat Public Schools, Dr. Bastian introduced activities that ranged from creating a life-sized camel from discarded soda cans to using mixed media for unique depictions of Oman's landscape and architecture.

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TEACHER TRAINING  
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3. A major benefit of Dr. Bastian's assignment was her daily interaction with the public school teachers who comprised the team of Workshop instructors. With only 20% of their university courses devoted to studio work, art education graduates are ill-equipped for the classroom. "They are clamoring for help," the Director of Art for Muscat Public Schools said, as he encouraged Dr. Bastian to return and focus on in-depth teacher training. Responding to this need, Dr. Bastian quickly developed a proposal for next year's Festival and discussed it with H.E. Dr. Mona al-Jardani, Undersecretary for Education, who praised Dr. Bastian for "all of the good things you've been doing for the Festival, the arts, and the children of Oman."

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PUBLICITY  
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4. The highlight of media coverage of the Art Tent was a segment on the Oman TV's nightly news, when Dr. Bastian was interviewed briefly as part of the Muscat Municipality festivities celebrating the children's artwork. In addition, she was interviewed by Oman radio, whose English FM program has an estimated audience of 500,000.

BALTIMORE